

Is Job Performance a Function of Reinforcement?

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Abstract: This study examined effect of reinforcement on job performance among staff of Nigerian Television Authority comprising 8 males and 7 females between the ages of 28 to 57 years ($M = 38.13$, $SD = 9.75$) using simple random sampling. Nigerian Television Authority performance appraisal scale and 10 % commission were used as measure and treatment condition for data collection. A quasi experiment involving pre-test and post-test design was used while matched t-test was used as statistical test for data analysis. The results indicated that paired samples t-test comparing job performance in pre and post reinforcement conditions showing a significant difference in the scores, pre job performance ($M = 52.53$, $SD = 10.31$) and post job performance ($M = 62.80$, $SD = 8.38$) conditions, $t(14) = -4.65$, $p < .01$. Thus, reinforcement was found to be a strong determinant of job performance and confirmed the assumptions of reinforcement theories (e.g. Skinner, 1963) that behaviour is a function of its consequences (reinforcement).

Key words: reinforcement, job performance, public service

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I. Background of the Study

Today's workplace is indeed experiencing transitions that affect the behaviour of employees such as job performance. For instance, organizations and work as a whole are undergoing dramatic changes (Howard, 1995) which have implications for workplace behaviour such as job performance (Ilgen & Pulakos, 1999), thus motivating researchers to make progress in clarifying job performance (Campbell, 1990). Job performance is a multi-dimensional construct which indicates how well employees perform their tasks, the initiative they take and the resourcefulness they show in solving problems (Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003). It indicates the extent to which they complete tasks, the way employees utilise their available resources and the time and energy they spend on their tasks (Boshoff & Arnolds, 1995). Job performance according to Viswesvaran and Ones (2000) refers to a "scalable actions, behaviour and outcomes that employees engage in or bring about that are linked with and contribute to organizational goals."

In Nigerian organizations especially the public sector, job performance is below expectation. Available research finding (e.g. Jike, 2003) as cited in (Emeh, 2012) show that the performance of the public service in virtually all tiers of government in Nigeria has remained very dismal, hence causing the present state of underdevelopment. The dismal performance of parastatals and agencies of government, like the former National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) and the Nigerian Telecommunication (NITEL) is very obvious in this regard (Okafor, 2004). Over the years, managers are more concerned with employees' performances in terms of productivity and efficiency because it affects organizations, yet proper attention has not been given to factors such as reinforcement which could improve it. Past research has shown that poor job performance and low productivity are recorded in almost all public sector in Nigeria (Mbogu, 2001; Ezulike, 2001; Iheriohanma, 2006); and findings from other studies (e.g. Tongo, 2005) show that the poor performance and productivity associated with Nigeria's public servants could be reduced if they are provided with reinforcement such as financial incentives or other forms of reinforcement. Interestingly, many of the managers, directors and ministers of public service in Nigeria such as the Nigerian Television Authority, are ignorant of the role of reinforcement in enhancing job performance. According to Muogbo (2013) good reinforcement and other forms

of remuneration have been found over the years to be one of the policies organizations can adopt to increase their workers performance and thereby increase the organizations productivity.

The use of performance incentives such as reinforcement dates back to the era of scientific management movement, which was championed by Taylor (1911) in the early 20th century to resolve the problem of soldiering at work. In Nigeria as well, interest in effective use of rewards (reinforcements) to influence workers performance and to motivate them began in the 1970s. And studies (e.g. Kayode, 1973, Egwuridi, 1981, Nwachukwu, 1994 & Ajila, 1997) were done in this area. Since then, the use of reinforcement to improve job performance has become a prominent area in human resource management. In most countries, private sector has continued to employ reinforcement with a view to increase the performance of their workers, yet it has been largely ignored by the public sector (Behn, 1995 & Reilly, 2003) resulting in poor job performance of civil servants. To some people (Okafor, 2009; Okpata, Utobo, Okafor & Nwegbe, 2000), decreasing efficiency and declining productivity of civil servants is part of the degeneracy that have come to characterize our socio-political and cultural systems, to others, such as Nwachukwu (1999), declining performance and productivity are direct consequences of lack of proper motivation (reinforcement). And proper motivation using reinforcement system (Chang & Lee, 2006) is through the application of reinforcement which is a stimulus that produces desired behaviours with different occurrences and schedules (Skinner, 1963).

Generally, reinforcement system is important, even to the degree that it affects organizational performance, employee satisfaction with pay, employee retention and employee motivation (Shields, Scott, Sperling & Higgins, 2009). From a psychological perspective, the understanding of reinforcement system preference assists organizations and companies in designing a proper reward system to meet the actual needs of employees and enhance their job performance. The right reinforcement system will drive performance. It will attract, retain and motivate employees to do their best; hence this present study investigated influence of reinforcement on job performance among personnel of Nigerian Television Authority.

Reinforcement and Performance

Available theoretical and empirical studies have significantly explained the role of reinforcement in job performance. For instance, the situational theory (Wall, Corbett, Martin, Clegg, & Jackson, 1990) refers to factors in the individuals' environment which stimulate and support or hinder performance. The situational perspective encompasses approaches which focus on workplace factors but also specific motivational approaches which follow for example from expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) or by establishing perceptions of equity and fairness (Adams, 1963; Greenberg, 1990) or approaches which aim at improving performance by reward systems (Skinner, 1963). Reinforcement theory (Skinner, 1963) asserts that an individual's behaviour is a function of its consequences (Management Study Guide, 2013). Reinforcement theory built on operant conditioning suggests that environmental factors (e.g. reward) contribute to the shaping of behaviour (e.g. job performance) in the organization. Positive reinforcement (e.g. monetary bonus) is a desirable consequence that follows a response (e.g. high job performance) and increases the probability that the response will be repeated while negative reinforcement is the removal of an unpleasant stimulus (e.g. demotion) when a desired response (e.g. high job performance) occurs (Wood, Wood, & Boyd, 2005).

Empirically, Hinkin and Schriesheim (2004) in a study of 243 employees of two different hospitality organizations found that those employees who received feedback from their managers, whether positive feedback or negative/corrective feedback, showed improved performance. This study also found that omission of commentary on good performance diminished worker effectiveness and reduced worker satisfaction. This supports the theory of operant conditioning which suggests that a behaviour that is totally ignored will eventually be extinguished. Similarly, Boachie-Mensah and Dogbe (2011) in a survey of one hundred and fifty respondents found a minimal effect of performance-based pay on employee performance and the motivational effect of merit pay often blunted by biased performance appraisal. Following these related theoretical and empirical review, the researchers hypothesized that reinforcement will significantly influence job performance.

II. Method

Participants: A total of 15 participants comprising 8 males and 7 females staff of the marketing department, Nigerian Television Authority between the ages of 28 to 57 years ($M = 38.13$, $SD = 9.75$) were sampled using simple random sampling. This is a sampling in which a subset of individuals (a sample) is chosen from a larger set (a population). Each individual is chosen randomly and entirely by chance, such that each individual has the same probability being chosen at any stage during the sampling process, and each subset of k individuals has the same probability of being chosen for the sample as any other subset of k individuals (Yates, Moore & Starnes, 2008). This was achieved using odd and even number technique which ensured that the sample from the population was an adequate representation and without bias.

Instrument: Nigerian Television Authority job performance appraisal scale and 10% commission (reinforcement) were used as measures.

Nigerian Television Authority Job Performance Appraisal Form: This refers to an important activity that provides both the goals and methods to achieve the organizational goals and also provides the achievement level in terms of out-put, as measured by the Nigerian Television Authority performance appraisal form. The supervisors of the participants (marketing staff) assessed and provided the scores that enabled the researchers measure the participants' job performance.

10% Commission(Reinforcement): This is a reward (10% commission on every business/advert attracted to the organization) that strengthened an employee's (a marketing staff of Nigerian Television Authority staff) job-related behaviours (e.g. job performance). And this 10% served as the reinforcement in this study.

Procedure: The researchers wrote to the management of the Nigerian Television Authority, seeking permission to carry out this study. In the letter, the researchers explained the need for the study and the benefit therein if allowed to do so, thus permission was granted within two weeks. However, the participants underwent pre-test-post-test assessment. In the pre-test, the supervisors serving as research assistants assessed the employees' (participants') job performance using the Nigerian Television Authority Job Performance Form and took record of the scores. Subsequently, treatment which was the introduction of the 10% commission to the participants as reinforcement followed. After a period of three months (since the appraisal was done twice in a year) upon introduction of the reinforcement, the researchers carried out the post-test. In the post-test the supervisors again, assessed the job performance of the participants. The scores before and after the reinforcement were given to the researchers by the supervisors. Further, the researchers compared the job performance score of the participants before and after the reinforcement (10% commission) which enabled the analysis.

Design/Statistics: This study was a quasi experiment involving pre-test, post-test design. According to Cook and Campbell (1975), this design is a non-equivalent control group design because it includes both an experimental and control group but subjects are not randomly assigned to groups, with a pre-test, post-test within subjects design with two conditions (A = pre performance appraisal; B = treatment (introduction of reinforcement) and C = post performance appraisal). This is in line with McQueen and Knussen (2006) assertion that each participant in within subject design experiences each condition of an independent variable, with measurement taken on each occasion and with the assumption that it almost entirely eliminates individual variability. While matched t-test was used as statistical test for data analysis.

III. Results

Table 1: Summary table of Matched T-test on pre-test post-test showing the influence of reinforcement on job performance.

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	p
Reinforcement	Pre Performance	52.53	10.32	-4.56	14	.01
	Post-Performance	62.80	8.38			

From the table 1 above, participants obtained significant higher score in Post job performance condition ($M=62.80$, $SD=8.38$) than in the Pre job performance condition ($M=52.53$, $SD=10.31$), thus indicating that reinforcement significantly influenced job performance of marketing staff of Nigerian Television Authority, $t(14)=-4.65$, $p = .01$. Meaning that introduction of reinforcement brought about increase in job performance. And this confirmed the hypothesis.

Discussion and Implications of the Findings

In congruence with previous findings (e.g. Dichiario, 2006, Raj, Nelson & Rao, 2006) the findings of this study indicate that reinforcement significantly influence job performance, hence confirming the hypothesis. According to the findings, job performance increased remarkably after the introduction of reinforcement. Thus, showing that behaviour (job performance) is a consequence of reward (reinforcement). And this is in line with reinforcement theory (Skinner, 1963) which asserts that an individual's behaviour is a function of its consequences (Management Study Guide, 2013).

This outcome gives credence to the fact that every worker works in other to maximize profit, earn a better living and provide for his/her relations and loved ones, especially in this part of the world.

Theoretically, the findings have implications for understanding reinforcement theories (e.g. Skinner, 1963) by demonstrating that behaviour (e.g. job performance) is a function of its consequences. And have shown that reinforcement because is a mechanism through which job performance could be improved in public

workplaces such as Nigerian Television Authority. Also, it has demonstrated a practical approach to the study and improvement of workers' job performance in Nigerian public workplaces, by applying reinforcement principles and techniques. This practical implication is important because unlike many studies it did not rely on self report. This study therefore, has somehow provided a platform for employers of labour in Nigerian public and private sectors to understand the implications of reinforcement for improving job performance of employees. This will go a long way in increasing the effectiveness, efficiency of employees and general productivity of organizations especially in this period of recession.

Limitations of the Study

The sample coming from one organization did not represent other public workplaces in Nigeria. Again, getting approval for this kind of study from public workplace comes with a lot of challenges and bureaucratic bottle neck that characterize the Nigerian public service; hence the researcher could not sample other similar workplaces. These resulted in the small sample size. Thus, generalizing the findings of this study should be done with caution.

Conclusion and recommendations

Considering the findings of this study, the researchers concluded that reinforcement is a significant factor in employees' job performance, thus the following recommendations:

1. Employers in the public sector should be more business oriented by setting targets for their employees and backing it up with commissions (reinforcement) in order to enhance their job performance.
2. Employers should let employees understand the relationship between input (effort and services given to the organization) and the outcome (reinforcement) such as salary, promotion and bonus. This will among other factors enhance employees' job performance.
3. Finally, Nigerian public service should review the various laws and conditions of service as many of them have serious bureaucratic bottle neck that hinders workers' job performance. Decision makers in the public service workplace should make and implement policies that will use reinforcement as a tool to motivate workers.

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